

Escaping Black Mesa A HalfLife Story

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Category: Half-Life

Genre: Fantasy, Sci-Fi

Language: English

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2012-02-19 04:20:31

Updated: 2012-02-19 04:20:31

Packaged: 2016-04-26 22:07:44

Rating: K

Chapters: 1

Words: 22,067

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Alison, an analyst at Black Mesa, finds herself trapped within the same frightening facility as Dr. Gordon Freeman. Even with help from her friends, will she ever make it out alive? And if so... at what cost?

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Escaping Black Mesa

It was an average day, in New Mexico. It was an average day for everyone, except for those who worked at Black Mesa. Today could be one of the biggest days the facility could ever know. Alison Williams was currently on a monorail heading for her office. She was about five feet tall, with long blonde hair. She had piercing blue eyes, and was skinny as a twig. She was fit, and had passed all the Black Mesa Hazard courses. Little did she know that it would be the last day she ever worked at Black Mesa. Today's experimentation would bring about "unforeseen consequences".

Black Mesa was a top secret establishment. Only those with the best education got in, and sometimes not even them. Alison was among the few who did get in, but she was not a top scientist, she was not the most important person in the facility, and she was not a test subject. She was an analyst, or a programmer. It depended on the day of the week. She was in charge of monitoring the radiation levels in all the test chambers, and fixing all the holes in the system, if any appeared. In essence, she was a very important part in today's experimentation, but when the day ended her importance would fade. Without her, if a failure was imminent, there would be no warning. People, could get hurt.

The monorail which Alison was riding on slid to a slow halt. "_Please remain seated until the car has come to a complete stop_", said the computerized voice that Alison had come to hear every day. There was nothing different about it today, and she hardly noticed its soft voice. The side door opened, and Alison stepped out of the car. The

long catwalk to the blast door teetered over a dark abyss.

There was no danger of falling. This was routine for most employees at Black Mesa. It was either get comfortable with the strangeness, or you're fired.

The security guard at the station glanced at her. "Identification please," he said. It was a joke nowadays. Everyone knew everyone in their sector, and Mark the security guard was no exception. He was a funny guy, who liked his job very much. He was tall, and had black hair and green eyes. He seemed to be about 24 years old, but Alison had never thought to ask. They were friends in a way, but almost never talked.

"Very funny Mark," Alison said smiling. She handed him the ID card anyway. It was standard procedure. Mark scanned the card, and it flashed green, as always. The blast doors slowly started to open. "See you later, Mark," Alison called as she walked through.

The door shut behind her. After some whirring and buzzing, the second door in front of her opened. The room in front of Alison had been visited by her many times before. She knew who worked this shift. The man at the desk looked up.

"I hate secretary shift," he joked.

"Oh, you'll have to deal with it Barney," Alison said, faking exasperation.

"You're early today," Barney remarked.

"Am I? Must have set my clock too early," she replied.

"It's almost 7:30. Oh well. An early start should do us all some good," he said, "I'll see you later then."

Waving goodbye, Alison walked down the hallway to the right. She took another right, and then yet another, when she came to her analyst office. Many analysts worked here, but since she was early, none had shown up yet. She sat down at her computer, and began to run diagnostics on the system's functions. She didn't want any problems today.

An error appeared on her screen. She sighed and held her head. The system had been buggy for a few days now. Alison suspected that someone was using the equipment for a different purpose than its builders had anticipated. She didn't ask questions though. Nobody did, at Black Mesa. Not if they wanted to keep their jobs.

At around 8:00, all her coworkers had arrived. She glanced at the camera that was focused in the test chamber that was to be used today. Running a scan on the room proved it to be empty of harmful radiations, and the equipment was working fine.

"Now where's the man who's supposed to run this thing?" Alison thought, It's 8:00 and he's not here yet!"

A sample of some crystal thing was to be tested today. It was very hush-hush, so Alison didn't know much about it. Again, at Black Mesa, nobody asked questions. She just knew that the man who was in charge

of the actual testing was late. She grumbled in frustration. When the person using the equipment was late, it made everything harder. She knew the equipment in the room wouldn't be able to work at the capacity it was at for long.

Alison tried to recall the man's name. "_Jordan Freeman. No... Gordon Cleveland? No.. It was... Gordon Freeman!"_ Satisfied that she could remember his name, she went back to monitoring the chamber. She told herself that she would complain to the management later.

For fun, she inserted a CD into the player by her computer. She turned the volume up, and some of her coworkers started cheering. What was the point of being a programmer, and working in a top-secret facility if you couldn't have any fun?

****About** **30 minutes later****

It was 8:30.

It was 8:30, and Gordon Freeman wasn't in the testchamber yet. Alison wondered what could be keeping him. Maybe he was just taking his time to put his suit on. Those HEV suits could be complicated, but they were mandatory

A few minutes later, Alison received a message that Gordon Freeman had just arrived. Alison looked at her clock; it was 8:47. Somebody was _late. _She leaned back into her chair and turned the music off. In a few minutes, Gordon Freeman should be ready for the test.

She was right. After about 15 minutes, he entered the testchamber.

Alison watched him on the security camera mounted by her desk. Dr. Freeman was climbing a ladder. At the top of the ladder, he came to a console. He began pressing some buttons on the control panel. A few seconds later, the test sample came up to the chamber. Alison stared at the orange-brown blotch that was the crystal. It didn't look that amazing to her. She'd heard the talk about it, and decided not to make any rash decisions. Apparently, it was some amazing scientific breakthrough.

She had her own personal doubts, though.

Alison started to run a diagnostic, it was her job to make sure that people were safe when handling these hazardous materials. All readings came up fine, but she couldn't get rid of the feeling that something was wrong. It was a cold dread, that crept up her spine and gave her goosebumps.

She remembered this feeling. She always got it when something bad was going to happen. She was about to mention this to the person seated behind her, when a voice interrupted her thoughts.

The voice came from the intercom next to her computer, "What are your readings, Alison?"

"All fine," she answered, still perplexed.

"Okay then," said the voice, "You may proceed Gordon." The transmission switched off, and Alison could no longer hear what the

scientists where saying.

Alison switched her screen over to the readings graph. Everything was still fine. Nothing seemed to be wrong... But why couldn't she shake the feeling of terror and dread? She shoved her thoughts to the back of her mind, determined to ignore them and get back to work. That exact moment, an error came up on her screen.

"97% CHANCE OF FAILURE. END EXPERIMENT IMMEDIATELY."

Gasping, Alison slammed down the intercom button. "Turn off the experiment! There's a major malfunction!"

She was answered, but the scientists sounded amused. "The malfunction is well within acceptable levels, get back to work."

Alison realized that they didn't understand. She started to tell them the percent levels, when she heard them screaming over the intercom. It was then she wished she hadn't come to work that day, and the room started to fill with smoke due to malfunctioning machines.

"It's not shutting down! It won't shut down! Oh no, it-"

The transmission was cut off by static. Alison tried sending a message to ask them to repeat, but all she got was a loud hissing noise. Static attack.

An explosion echoed through the building. Alison whipped around, computer momentarily forgotten. Some of her fellow analysts had heard it too. Querulous murmuring came from all the people in the room.

"What was that?"

"Is something wrong with the experiment?"

Most of the people looked to Alison for an explanation. She never got the chance to tell them, as a tremor shook through the walls.

"Brace yourselves!" someone called.

"It's a little late for that, isn't it?" someone screeched at them.

Another explosion sounded. Alison turned back to her security cam. She got a brief glimpse of a destroyed test chamber, with electricity buzzing around the walls, before her camera was destroyed by what looked like green lightning. What worried her most was that she hadn't seen Dr. Freeman. Was he okay?

Then the biggest explosion of them all shook the room. The fearful mumbling turned to screaming as the ceiling came down, and pipes and vent shafts came unscrewed from the ceiling. The green lighting was flying across the room, and electrifying everything it touched. Alison managed to cover her head and duck under her desk before the room went dark and she lost consciousness, buried under a light rubble.

A man in a blue suit with a briefcase walked by the destroyed room. He didn't even glance through the window...

Alarms were blaring in Alison's ears. Red lights flashed overhead. She was alone in the room. Her fellow analysts were gone. She wondered if they had been incinerated by the lightning, or if they had just abandoned her. She hoped they hadn't abandoned her...

Many of the computers in the room had exploded, or fallen over. She went over to the door, and tried to open it. One of the many fallen machines was blocking it. The room was filling with smoke, at an alarming rate. She needed to get out. On top of it all, one of the processing machines was smoking and sparking dangerously. It looked like it was about to explode.

Green lights still zapped around the room every now and then. They seemed to have something inside them, something alive. Suddenly, a creature dropped from a green nova that zapped just feet away from Alison. The creature was about four inches larger than her head, and it had four small legs. The front two legs were bigger than the back two, and had wicked hooks on the edges. It didn't look like it had any eyes, and it was an ugly fleshy color. What frightened her the most was that its underside was reddish, like blood. It turned toward her, and lifted its front legs up and waved them at her.

Alison didn't know what it was, but when it jumped at her face, she let out a small scream of surprise. From this angle, she could see the creature's underside had an indent in it, about the size of a human head. It was lined with teeth. It hissed in frustration, when Alison dodged out of the way. After it's attack, she dubbed the creature a "face-hugger," and as an enemy.

Thinking fast, Alison realized that she needed to get out of the room before the face-hugging alien actually made it's target. Something told her that if it landed on her face, it wouldn't be pretty. Plus, the smoke was starting to gag her, and she was beginning to get a headache.

A vent shaft hung loosely from the ceiling. If she could reach it, she could crawl around and get out. She stood on a desk, and jumped. Her fingers caught the edge, and she managed to pull herself up. Clean air whooshed out from beyond in the vent. She wouldn't die of smoke inhalation in here. The face-hugger creature below hissed, and tried to jump into the vent. Luckily, it was too great a height for it to surpass. Relieved, Alison pressed on.

Now she could focus on finding out what the heck was going on.

The alarms were still flashing, and the vents were lit up with red lights every few seconds. The whine of the alarms was magnified in the small vent shaft, and Alison feared she would go deaf if she stayed in there for much longer. Crawling along the shaft, she came to an output shaft. She followed it and jumped down into another room, busting out the screen with her feet.

She recognized the room, as the main lobby. It was all but destroyed. The desk was on fire, and the computers on the walls were sparking and broken. Some of them looked as if they'd been smashed. There was no sign of Barney. She stood for a moment. A mere hour ago, this room had been in perfect condition. Barney was a good friend of hers, and she was worried about him. She looked around, didn't see a body. She took that as a good sign.

"_He must have survived if there's no body." _the reasoned.

Alison looked around for a way out. She needed to get back to the monorail and get help from the surface. This place was starting to freak her out.

"_T__he blast doors..."_Alison thought. If she could get them open, she could get to a monorail and get out of here. She frantically started pressing all buttons that said "open" on them. Nothing worked. Finally, she went over to the blast doors and mashed buttons on the panel next to them.

After a few tries, the doors sighed opened. She sprinted through, and came to a skidding halt when she saw what remained of the catwalk. A few jagged feet of its remains hung over the abyss. The rest of it was gone. A lone cable hung from the ceiling, and there looked to be a bloodied hand-print on it.

In the distance, Alison could see that the monorail track itself was destroyed too. In the dark abyss, she could see the monorail car's lights blinking. They seemed oddly subdued, and forlorn.

"What am I supposed to do now?" Alison yelled out into the black abyss. There was no way out now. She thought she was going to cry, when she heard someone scream behind her.

Then she heard the echo of footsteps down the hall. She turned around to stare into the wild eyes of a maddened guard. The man was screaming in fear, and he ran through the blast doors without a second glance at what was ahead of him. He didn't see the abyss beckoning, and bolted straight over the edge. With one last shriek, he hit the bottom. Alison had never heard something so sickening, so _unearthly_. She thought it was the worst thing she had ever heard, but more was to come.

The guttural snarls that came from the dark abyss were the most frightening sound. She could hear whatever creatures down there devour the guard's remains. They seemed to be snarling and growling, like they were fighting for every bite. Alison caught a glimpse of red eyes glaring up at her, and leopard patterned skin in the lights from the monorail car. Then the beasts loped off into the darkness.

Sickened, she looked for somewhere to go. She tried to get the picture of the creature out of her mind. She tried to focus on escaping. Alison was a survivor at heart, and she quickly regained her composure.

To her right, there was a maintenance ladder that led up to a dark window. Lights were flickering within. She was trying to focus on the ladder so she wouldn't throw up, and started walking toward it. She focused on it's details. It was a sturdy steel ladder, bolted to the side of the building.

She started climbing up, and thought about what she was to do now. "_If I go__ upwards, won't I be one step closer to the surface?"_ she reasoned, "_That seems to be what I should do." _

The dark office at the top of the ladder was some kind of janitor

supply closet. There were tools, and cleaners. It looked like it was basically for maintenance workers and other janitorial jobs.

Tools like, wrenches, crowbars, and screwdrivers, were scattered about the floor, only a few remained in their respective places. They looked like they had been thrown about the room when the explosion bumped the facility around... and let the monsters she'd seen in.

She shook the thoughts out of her head, and looked around the room for a way out. There was another door at the far end of the office. Something hissed at her when she neared a vent shaft in the ceiling, and she jumped back alarmed. She frantically grabbed a tool from the floor to use as a weapon in case the creature happened to be less than friendly. There was a sharp _thwack _and the vent cover fell out. Something dead squashed to the floor. It was a face-hugger. It's smooth, slimy skin was marred with sharp wounds. It looked like it had been stabbed to death, brutally. Out of each deep wound, leaked green blood.

Momentarily distracted by the dead creature, she almost didn't notice when something else started coming out of the vent, and it was alive! The random tool she had picked up was positioned like a baseball bat, ready to swing. In the back of Alison's mind, she noted that the tool she was borrowing was a crowbar.

There was more rustling in the vent. Whatever was coming out was a lot bigger than a face-hugger. Alison gasped in surprise when two brown-orange boots stuck out through the vent. A figure dressed in orange jumped down, and kicked aside the dead face-hugger at the same time. The man stood up and looked at Alison.

He was dressed in an orange Hazard Environment Suit, or an HEV suit. He had short brown hair, and wore glasses. He also had a light mustache. In the current light, Alison though he looked looked dangerous, and took a few steps back. For some reason he terrified her so, that she didn't recognize him at all.

He looked at Alison and said nothing. Then he looked away, and bent over to grab another crowbar off of the floor. Alison saw him drop a jagged piece of metal when he picked up the crowbar. It had green blood on it.

Then she noticed the name tag attached to the suit.

"Gordon Freeman"

It was the man from the test! "_Maybe he knows what's going on!" _Alison thought excitedly. Right as Alison was about to ask him, he turned, opened the door, and the ran down the hall. He didn't look back.

"Wait!" Alison cried in vain, "Come back! I need to ask you something!"

She got the strangest feeling that even if she had asked, he wouldn't have answered, and just have stared with those strange blue-green eyes.

Alison watched Dr. Freeman turn around a corner. As if to salute his

departure, the facility went deathly silent. The alarms had stopped.

For some reason, Alison took that as a bad sign. Something was wrong. Instead of fleeing down the same hallway Gordon had taken, she turned into a locker room to the left, hoping to escape the feeling of dread that had surrounded her. After the power-door slid silently behind her, she tried to relax. Something sniffed behind her, and she heard whimpers that sounded like a dying animal.

"Who's there?" someone said in a very shaky voice.

"Show yourself!" Alison called into the seemingly empty locker room.

A locker slid slowly open, and a foot stepped out. A scientist, still in his lab coat, slowly inched out. He glanced at Alison, as if he couldn't believe she was real. He was wild-eyed with terror.

"Thank goodness," he cried, "I thought I was the only survivor!"

Alison sat down on a bench, relieved that the scientist had not turned out to be some alien monster. For some reason, her white jacket and gray pants looked funny to her, against the dark wood. Suddenly, she realized that her work clothes would not be much protection against the creatures she had seen so far.

It was then she decided she wanted some answers. NOW.

"Only survivor of what exactly?" she asked the scared scientist, pointedly.

"One of our experiments has gone terribly wrong!" he whispered loudly.

"I would have never guessed," said Alison sarcastically.

"We're all trapped down here!" he continued as if he hadn't been interrupted, "Our communications are down, everything! I'm still surprised we have power. Someone had to go for help! So, we sent someone!"

"Who did you send?" queried Alison, curious. She hoped they hadn't sent some total idiot, like Joff from sector 3. He was the weirdo who was found in the oddest places. Alison had found him hiding in the woman's locker room once. That had not been a pleasant experience for the both of them. Another time he had been found sleeping inside the desk in the main lobby.

"Well, we sent Gordon Freeman," said the scientist, "He's young and fit, and he's passed all the training courses, and he has one of the 15 HEV suits left in the facility," he replied.

"What happened to the others?"

"Destroyed in the blast."

"An HEV suit... Interesting," said Alison, "Do you think I could get one of those?"

"Well," started the scientist, "This is a locker room. There should be one in your size. If you take a left over there, there should be another suit in the prep station."

"Thanks," said Alison gratefully, "Do you want to come with me? I'm going to try to head for the surface."

"Oh no no no no! I'll stay in here! I know it's safe in here. Besides, I heard that soldiers are coming to rescue us!" he said excitedly.

Suddenly Alison turned suspicious.

"Where did you hear all of this information?" Alison asked, puzzled, "I thought communications were down."

The scientist looked a little startled, like he'd been caught in a lie. "I was the man who helped start the experiment," he stammered, "I know what's happening, because I was with a group of guards. They had radios, and I could hear the radio chatter. But anyway, I cannot go with you."

"Suit yourself," Alison said, "I've got to get going now." A few seconds later, Alison smiled at her own pun. She wondered if the scientist had caught it.

Alison walked down to the HEV suit room. Fortune smiled upon her, there was one suit left. The helmet was missing, but it was better than nothing. Alison put on the orange armored suit, and the automatic system started going through the safety checklist.

"Welcome to the HEV Mark 4 protective system. For use in hazardous environments and conditions..." drawled the suit. Alison was not in the mood for hearing the rules and capabilities of the suit, she turned down the volume until the computer was finished talking. She noticed that although the suit was made of metal, it was a lot lighter than she had expected. She was glad she could still rely on her flexibility and speed.

Now that she had a protective suit, it was time to leave the locker room, and find a way to the surface. There was only one problem with her plan. She had no idea how to get to the surface. She had always used the monorail to get out, and Black Mesa never had fire drills.

She glanced at the signs posted on the wall, and tried to get a reference point. There were several places that Alison could have gone to, but she decided that the best place to go would be the Security Station. There would be weapons there, and maybe some of the surviving security personnel. She could use all the help she could get.

The sign said that the Security Station was on level 34.

The facility was built on a special system, since most of the facility was underground. Level zero, was the top level, or the surface. Level 62 was the bottom-most level, and Alison had no desire to be there. She at least knew that she was on level 44, as it was

her work level. She needed to get up somehow. Another sign below the first one said there was an elevator down the hall. Not believing her good luck, she ran down the hallway. Sure enough, there was the elevator, and it looked to be in pretty good shape too!

Alison pressed the button to summon the elevator. A few seconds went by. A flash of blue-gray and the sound of screaming startled her. She glimpsed the elevator falling down the shaft, it's cables broken and whipping back and forth. People were in the elevator, and she heard them screaming at the top of their lungs. The fell all the way to level 62, 18 levels below her. The almost imperceptible crash woke Alison from her trance of terror and dread. Now how was she going to get up to the Security Station? She looked around in the now empty shaft. A service ladder was off to her left. There was only one problem. The ladder went downward, the opposite direction she wanted to go.

A flash of green lighting made the decision of weather to go down the ladder, or find a different elevator. Something large was sneaking up on her. It had just teleported from somewhere else! It let out a long, deep growl. Practically flying from the platform, Alison jumped to the ladder. She looked up just in time to see a large creature snap it's red tentacles lined with teeth were she had been moments ago.

Alison climbed down the ladder as quickly as she could without risking injury. A short way down, she came to another platform. She was now on level 45.

"This is no good, I want to be going up!" _she thought frustratedly.

Looking around, Alison made an observation. This level was in even worse shape than the one she had just left. It must have been the level that the experiment took place in. Live wires hung from the ceiling, shooting sparks, and rubble layered the floor.

Along with all the mess, there were strange globes of light floating around. Alison bent closer to examine one. As she did, a face-hugger jumped at her from behind. Alison turned just in time, and ducked out of the way. The creature landed in the globe of light, and vanished. Alison looked all around for it. It never emerged from the light.

With a shock of realization, she knew they were portals. Maybe one could take her to the surface! She knew the chances of that were slim, but she was also very curious. Alison decided that she had nothing to lose. Remembering the phrase, "Curiosity killed the cat," Alison stepped into one of the glowing orbs.

A loud buzzing sound filled her ears, and her vision faded. Blackness was all she could see. Then, bright green lights danced back and forth in her eyelids. She compared the situation to being electrocuted, without the danger or pain. Then, the lights faded, and blackness overtook her vision...

She slumped to the floor, and blinked in the sudden light, Alison found that she was exhausted. Whatever ran that portal, it really took the energy out of her. She rested for a moment, and then stood up to continue on. She wondered what time it was. How long had she been

out? She did a quick body-check, to make sure she was okay. Finding everything to be normal, she looked around. As she did so, she became dizzy. Resting against a wall, she tried to regain her senses.

The dizziness passed, and she looked up once more to see where she was. She was in a dimly-lit hallway, with only one door in sight. The door lead to a dark office that had its lights off. Alison looked around for any signs. She wanted to know if she was still on level 45. It didn't look like level 45. Seeing no other path, she headed for the office.

Taking a few steps, something rounded the corner behind her. It growled deeply. Alison turned around, and came face-to-face with an alien creature. It was the size of an alligator, and looked like an alligator, except that its head was a writhing mass of red tentacles. The tentacles were lined with teeth, and looked strong enough to break bones. It took a few threatening steps toward Alison.

She didn't even consider fighting it. It was too big, and all she had was her little crowbar. Instead, she ducked into the office, and slammed the door behind her, cutting off the light. The office was dark, and she couldn't see anything. Something squished beneath her feet. Alison felt around for a light switch, just as the alligator-squid began to beat upon the door.

She found a switch, and flicked it on.

She immediately wished she hadn't. On the floor, there was a dead security guard, in a growing pool of blood. In his outstretched arm, there was a gun, pointed at a ventilation shaft in the wall. Despite all the blood, the pistol was clean. Alison snatched up the gun, and held it to the door. If the thing beat down the door, maybe she'd get a clean shot at it.

The hinges on the door were starting to give. Alison thought fast. The vent shaft was open, she could escape through there! But what if whatever killed the guard was in there? She decided to risk it. Whatever was in the vent had to be a lot smaller than the Octo-Gator outside the office.

Alison dove down into the vent, just as the Octo-Gator crashed down the door, and came snarling into the office. It was disappointed to see the office empty, and it's quarry disappearing into the wall. Furious, it tried to snap at the feet still protruding from the vent. It missed, and Alison sped down the vent, as fast as she could possibly army-crawl.

She stopped a few seconds later, to see if she was being followed. She didn't hear anything, and kept going. Her gun was held ready, in case there happened to be any pests in the vent. Soon, she came to the end of the shaft. Through the screen, she could see that her exit was into a supply closet. Before charging into what looked like an empty room, Alison preformed a full scan with her eyes before she dared to lift the cover off the shaft.

Everything seemed to be normal. Alison jumped down, and heard the click of a gun cocking. She froze, and started mentally yelling at herself. She hadn't thought to look _down. _

"Freeze," said a voice, coming from behind her.

Alison grimaced. Looking around, she noticed she'd missed all the signs. Some of the crates were smashed, pieces littered the floor. Someone had to have broken them. Well, there was nothing she could do now.

Reluctantly, Alison turned around to face her captor.

It was a security guard. As soon as he saw her face, he lowered the gun. He recognized her, and she recognized him.

"Uh, sorry Ms. Williams. Thought you were someone else," he said sheepishly.

"That's all right, Mark," Alison said. She was glad that at least one of her friends has survived the epidemic. He looked unhurt, just frightened.

"So, why'd you pull a gun on me? I thought the aliens were the ones we had to worry about," Alison asked, confused.

Mark sighed. "If only the aliens were the problem. I received a call on my radio and of course, I tuned in on the signal. I heard the words, 'rescue mission' and spread the rumor that the soldiers were coming in to save us. I was wrong. I stayed on the channel for awhile, hoping that I could meet them at wherever they were going. Instead, I heard that the rescue mission had been canceled. The government is issuing a cover-up. They don't want word of what happened here getting out. The soldiers have orders to kill everyone involved in the experiment. That involves most of Black Mesa," Mark finished.

Alison was astonished. "They've come to kill us?" she asked, unbelieving.

"Yes," said Mark, "I've had a run-in with some of them on the top levels. I was up there for my second shift. I only got out of there alive because of my body armor and helmet."

Alison didn't know what to say. The rescue. Gone. In an instant, her hope of rescue vanished. But, with this revelation, came an even stronger will to survive. Alison WAS going to head to the surface. She WAS going to get out of here alive.

"Come on, Mark. Let's get out of here," Alison said, a new fire in her eyes.

"Okay," he said, "You lead though."

The two raced out into the hallway, but Alison stopped a few feet from the door.

"Say," she started, "What kind of aliens are down here, exactly?"

"Well, there's the face-hugging creatures, called headcrabs, the Octo-Gators, which the scientists are calling Bullsquid, Vortigaunts, and the little zapping jumpy things," Mark replied.

"What's a Vortiguant?" Alison asked.

"Well," started Mark, "They're bipeds, but they have three arms, and three eyes. They can shoot green lightning. I saw some soldiers fighting them."

"Good to know," said Alison, "I hope we never meet any. Let's go."

They started off in the direction of the security station. Mark knew where it was, and he knew the shortest way there. On the way, she explained what had happened to her office. He told her a similar incident had happened to his station. Most of his fellow guards had either left him, or fallen prey to the soldiers.

"That really stinks," Alison said to him.

"I just hope that the ones who ran are okay," he said.

Mark stopped suddenly. He turned his head to one side, and listened.

"What?" Alison queried.

"I thought I heard moaning..." he said.

"Maybe it was another tremor," Alison guessed.

"I don't think so," Mark said, "If it was, wouldn't we have felt it?"

A low moan interrupted their thoughts, as a creature rounded the corner in front of them. It was looked human from a distance, but by the way it was acting, Alison knew it was not. It was moving slowly, and seemed to be shuffling toward them. Although it wore a lab coat, Mark pulled out his gun and fired at it before Alison could say anything.

"What is that thing?" She whispered to him.

"I don't know," Mark replied.

The two slowly walked up to the dead creature. A headcrab had attached itself to a member of the science team's head. The former member's fingers were curled into claws, and blood dripped down from it's neck and onto the floor. The former scientist had lacerations all down his chest and legs. Whatever had attacked him, the headcrab had won in the end.

Alison was a little shocked when the headcrab leaped from the dead scientist's head, and toward her face. Through reflexes, she managed to block it's assault. She whacked it across the room, where it landed with a thud on it's back. Within moments, it had flipped itself over and was coming toward her again. She shot it before it reached a few feet.

"Are you okay, Ali?" Mark asked, concerned.

"Yeah," she gasped, "those little buggers are persistent."

She managed a shaky laugh, and Mark helped her up. She hadn't

realized that she'd knelt down.

"Let's go," Mark said, "Before more come."

The two started walking toward a door at the end of the hallway, guns at ready. They didn't want any more zombie surprises.

Mark opened the door, and the two humans entered a giant room.

The room was at least 100 feet across, and 100 feet deep. She was standing on the edge of a chasm. Hanging from the ceiling, there were big crates filled with who-knew-what. On the opposite side of the huge room, Alison could make out a railed catwalk with a door. Down in the chasm, Alison could make out some creature, glaring up at them. It was too far down for it to attack them. Alison noted that the walls were too steep for it to climb. She didn't see it as a threat, so she ignored it.

"What do we do now?" Alison asked Mark.

"There's normally a lift that takes you across, but I don't see it. It might have come loose in the explosion."

"Maybe we could jump from crate to crate. That would get us across to that door," Alison said.

"Yeah, it would. But how do we get up to where the crates are?" Mark replied.

Alison looked around. To her right, she saw a ladder. It led up to another catwalk, and she could jump from the catwalk to the first crate. She pointed out the catwalk to Mark, and explained her idea.

"Hmm... That could work," he said reluctantly.

"Well, we don't have any other options," she pointed out.

"Fine, let's try it," Mark sighed.

The creature in the pit started struggling, and clawing at the sides when the two humans stood on the catwalk, about to jump onto the first crate. Alison leaped onto it, holding her balance. She gestured for Mark to follow her. He soon jumped onto the next crate after her.

They jumped from crate to crate, helping each other when the other slipped. Only once did Alison almost not make the crate. Finally, they made it to the catwalk across the chasm of a room. Looking down, she saw the pit creature glaring up at her, it was starting to jump at the side. It seemed to be getting higher with every jump. Alison looked back up at Mark.

"That creature doesn't look very happy," she said.

Mark looked down at the angry creature. He noticed it had some funny bunches at its sides, that looked like extended membranes. His dark eyebrows creased in confusion.

"That's funny," he said, green eyes narrowing.

"What?"

"That creature has wings, I wonder why it doesn't just fly-"

With a great whoosh of air, the pit creature launched itself into the air. It's dark scales were a turquoise-greenish color, and it had a long tail with feathers on the end. It's beaked head had four red eyes that glowed like fire. Inside it's birdlike beak, Alison could make out sharp teeth. All across it's head were brightly colored feathers, either red or pink. The body was short and fat, but it had two large feet with three split-toes on each foot. Each toe ended in a jagged claw.

Hissing, and foaming at the mouth, it lunged for Mark. He ducked, and rolled across the catwalk. He pulled out his pistol and started firing wildly. The bat-bird dodged the shots, while watching Alison crawl over to the wall. It decided that Mark was a better target, and dove again for him. He didn't even have a chance to scream, the alien was so fast. Mark was dumped off the side of the catwalk, words still hanging on his lips. His fingers caught the side of the rail, but he was slipping.

"Alison! Help me up!" he yelled over the screeching of the bird.

She sprinted over to the edge of the catwalk, and grabbed his hand. She started to pull him up, when the bird dove yet again. This time, it latched onto Mark as if it's life depended on it. The combined weight of both the bird and Mark was too much for Alison. She strained, and tried to pull harder, but her arms wouldn't obey.

"Alison," Mark started, "Let go."

"No!"

"Do it!" he urged.

Alison's arms made the decision for her, and they chose that time to give out. Mark's arm slipped, and he fell. The bird unhooked itself from Mark's back, and screeched in victory. It dove after Mark, while he tried to shoot it while falling.

"Mark!" Alison screamed. It was futile. There was no way Mark would survive the fall. Alison was angry now. This alien birdbrain had just killed her friend. It was going to die before she did. It was then that she noticed that the creature was having some trouble flying. It was almost as if it's body was too heavy for it, or like the gravity was pulling it downward too fast.

Alison pulled out the pistol she'd taken from the dead guard, right as the alien bird suddenly swooped upward to reach her. Firing three times, the bullets gave the creature dents in it's scales. Nothing more serious. Alison was at a loss. This thing was bullet proof. She needed a stronger gun, if she wanted to take this thing down.

Suddenly, the monster convulsed in mid-air, and then spewed forth an orb of electricity, that was coming toward her fast. Panicking, Alison looked at the beast for a weakness, while dodging the incoming

missile.

The wings.

The creatures wings were not armored, and it was already having flying trouble.

Aiming carefully, she shot each of the bird's membrane-y wings three times. The holes in the wings tore, when the bird tried to fly higher. The force of the wind was too great. With a great shredding sound, the bird suddenly found that IT was the one plummeting to it's death, along with poor Mark. With a screech of fury, or maybe terror, it hit the ground of the unforgiving metal chamber with a sickening thwack. It didn't move again.

Out of breath and gasping in terror, Alison looked down into the pit at her vanquished foe. She stooped, staring in shock. It suddenly dawned on her what she'd just done. She'd just taken out an alien mutant-bat-bird thing, possibly from another dimension!

Unable to contain herself, Alison started cheering at her success. Her joy was so great, that she did not notice the door slide open silently behind her, or detect the two armed soldiers step out.

"Freeze, scientist," said one of the soldiers.

Alison slowly turned around, hoping to see just a couple of security guards wondering what all the racket was. She was disappointed to see the two soldiers pointing their sub-machine guns at her.

"Looks like another involved in the experiment," says one of the soldiers.

The other soldier laughed evilly.

"What do you want?" Alison asked, panic starting to rise.

"Well," said one soldier, "We want to fulfill our orders, and get out of this alien-infested place."

"Yeah," said the other, "And while you're here, we can't do that."

"What are your orders?" asked Alison, "Maybe I can help you," she said, trying to buy time.

The two soldiers start laughing at some joke that Alison didn't hear. They relaxed somewhat, but their guns did not waver.

"Doubtful that you can help us, scientist."

"Yeah, because our orders are to kill all those involved with the experiment," explained one.

Suddenly, they both turned very serious. Their fingers were rested on the trigger. Their faces acquired look of stone, and they talked softly.

"Do you have any last words?" Asked one of the soldiers.

Alison desperately looked around for some way to buy time. She needed time, she needed to talk her way out of this somehow. Her salvation came not from anything around her, but rather from something behind THEM.

"My last words?" she said, "I think you two need to watch your back more often!"

Jumping to the side, barely in time, a great octo-gator that Alison had been watching approach, rushed at the soldiers. It was carrying such momentum that it launched both the soldiers into the bars of the catwalk. It desperately tried to turn around when it saw the pit, and it's powerful tail knocked the two stunned soldiers over the railing. The alien didn't turn around fast enough, and it too crashed through the bars, and plummeted down into the abyss. Alison couldn't believe her good luck.

She stood up to leave the room, and noticed that the two soldiers had dropped their guns before they were knocked over the side. She snatched one up, and then refilled it's ammo with the other. She threw the extra gun over the side. No one needed to discover that something strange had occurred here.

She froze, listening for sounds of other soldiers approaching. She didn't hear any. After a few minutes of waiting, she walked through the open door.

These hallways were untouched by the failed experiment. No cables hung from the ceiling, no craters were evident in the hallway. Alison was so absorbed in being able to see normal hallway again, she almost didn't notice the barricade that some soldiers had set up. Hiding behind a curve in the wall, she saw a scientist flee from a room in front of her.

He ran directly into a group of eight soldiers.

"Don't shoot! I'm on the science team! Please don't shoot!" he screamed.

Alison heard the guns fire, and she knew that the scientist was already dead. There were too many for her to take out by herself, so she stayed put, to listen.

"That's 17 for me," said one of the soldiers.

"Scientists don't count," said another, "They're too easy. It's the security guards who have guns. We need to worry about them."

"Yeah, there are the guards," said a third voice, "And the monsters, but who we really need to worry about is Gordon Freeman. He's our real problem."

Seven voices joined in agreement with the third speaker.

"Gordon Freeman?" _she thought, _"Why would they be after Gordon Freeman?"_

Alison decided that she had heard enough talk from the soldiers. She couldn't get past them, and was at a loss for what to do. Frustrated,

she knocked her fist against a wall.

Fatal mistake.

A loud thud echoed through the eerily quiet walls.

"What was that?" one of the soldiers said.

"Let's go see. I want some action!" said a deeper voice.

Footsteps echoed down the hallway. In panic, Alison jumped up and fled into a supply closet before she could be seen and shot by soldiers. She silently closed the door behind her and locked it. She breathed out a sigh of relief. They wouldn't look for her in here. Hopefully.

Turning around, she hoped to find an exit such as a vent shaft or a second door. What she was not expecting to see was a large pair of electrical blue eyes staring at her. They were cat eyes. Beast eyes. They didn't blink. Alison was immediately stricken by fear.

It was too dark in the closet to see what kind of creature the eyes belonged to. Alison froze, staring directly into those big, intelligent-looking eyes. She noted that they were very large. Larger than any eyes she'd ever seen on any animal. Whatever owned those eyes must be huge.

Alison stayed jammed up against the door, which if she opened would mean certain death. If the large eyes were hostile, they too would mean certain death.

The phrase, "stuck between a rock and a hard place" took on a new meaning for her.

She decided to take her chances with the eyes. They looked friendly-er. Besides, if the creature wanted to attack her, it would have done so already. Wouldn't it?

The creature let out a soft hiss. It slithered out of the darkness, and into the dim light.

Its body was jet-black. The blackest black Alison had ever seen. In fact, she thought that its eyes seemed out of place on that black body. They were a surprising color change, and Alison could help but stare.

The creature was long and snakelike, and covered in black scales. It had four legs, each ending in four clawed toes. Even its claws were black. Its head was triangular in shape, and had two frilly black ears. It had little barbs all the way from the tip of its nose to the end of its long snaky tail. Its tail ended in a sharp barb as well. As if it weren't impressive enough already, it had great black wings, all neatly folded up against its sides.

It was a dragon. An actual dragon, in a supply closet. Alison wondered why she wasn't dead yet. Maybe it was friendly. The dragon stared at her, with its beautiful blue eyes. After a moment, it retreated back into the shadows of the room, sniffing her as it went.

Alison tried to place the expression on its face. It almost looked as if it were looking for someone, or something. She decided that it looked lost, and sad. Like it had not a friend in the world. She was about to go over and see if it would let her pet it, when something started banging on the closed door she had so carefully locked.

"We've got two more in here!" yelled a soldier, in delight.

Alison took in a sharp breath. She dove behind some crates to hide herself. She saw the dragon look at her curiously. It cocked it's head to one side, and was staring at her. She didn't have the time to worry about the dragon. She was just sad that when the soldiers opened the door, they were probably going to kill it. At that thought, she was overcome with a great bout of sadness. She didn't know why, but it felt wrong to let the dragon die.

But there was nothing she could do to stop the soldiers.

Finally, the door opened. In a mad rush, three of the eight soldiers piled in at once.

"Whoa!" said one, "I thought I saw some eyes in here. Must be the light."

"You're daft," said a second voice, "There's probably nothing in here but two scared scientists."

"No, there's something else in here."

The dragon opened its eyes, curiously. It had held them shut when the door had first opened, to block out the bright light.

"What are you- Oy! There is a beast in here!"

"Quick! Shoot it!"

"Run!"

One of the less intelligent soldiers started firing upon the poor dragon stuck in the closet. That was when things got weird. Over the loud gunfire, Alison thought she could make out another sound. There seemed to be a loud ping in the air. Alison thought it was her ears ringing.

She heard the dragon hiss at the gunfire, and some of the soldiers started screaming. A blast of blue light lit up the supply closet, and the screams turned to pure terror. When the blue light stopped, not a single soldier was left, and there was not a sound to be heard.

Cautiously, Alison peered over the crate, not really sure what to expect. She was at least expecting the dragon to be injured or something. It wasn't, in fact, it seemed perfectly fine. The room around it looked like it had been super-cleaned. There was not a speck of dust floating in the air. Whole crates had vanished, like they'd been incinerated.

The dragon was breathing hard, and its eyes had gone from a beautiful blue to a bright cyan that Alison had never seen before, in any

creature's eyes. It seemed furious. Alison backed away, just in case the dragon decided that it was mad at her too.

It glanced over in her direction when she moved. Immediately, the brightness vanished from its eyes. It made a small chirping noise, and nosed it's way toward her. She sat down, not knowing what else to do.

The dragon curled up like a cat, and rested it's large head on Alison's lap. She was a bit surprised by this. It had just displayed a scary power, but was now behaving like a tame kitty-cat. It occurred to Alison that maybe this dragon was not an adult, but maybe still an adolescent. She could not help but like the poor thing.

The dragon started snoring softly. Great. Now it was asleep on her lap. She couldn't get up.

Soon, she became bored, and gradually decided on an activity that would entertain her.

"Well, all nice creatures like you deserve a name," Alison said to the huge sleeping form.

Alison thought of many names, but they all seemed wrong. She tried Saieli, and decided that was too girly. This dragon seemed male.

Finally, the thought to name it on a physical characteristic occurred to her. She remembered it's shockingly electric-blue eyes.

"That's what I'll call you," she said softly, "Electro."

When she whispered that name, the dragon awoke, and raised it's head. It stared at her straight in the eyes. Unknown words seemed to pass between them. Alison didn't know what those words where, but they seemed important.

"Are you going to help me?" Alison asked Electro.

The dragon stared her, unblinking. _"One could lose themselves in those eyes,"_ she thought. As if to answer he question, he slowly, and almost imperceptibly nodded.

"I must be crazy," she thought, _"Animals don't understand people. But... He's no regular animal after all."_

"Well, Electro, I need to get to the surface." Alison said the the dragon.

He seemed to understand her. He jumped up, and waited for her to open the door.

The empty hallway was eerily silent to Alison, when she opened the door. Surprisingly, there were not burn marks. She glanced at Electro in puzzlement. She tried to recall the scene in which the soldiers had been burned. The closet had been illuminated with a blue light.

Blue light. Not orange, like fire.

More like electricity.

"Well, if every other alien shoots electricity, why shouldn't the dragons?"_ she thought. It made sense. Glancing once more around the now-empty hallway, she still found it hard to believe that there were no ashes, or burned bodies. She stepped out of the closet and into the hallway proper. Electro waited for her to move out of the doorway, before launching himself out of the closet.

Before Alison could even react, Electro had bounded down the hallway where the soldiers had been stationed, and looked back at her, as if waiting for her to follow him.

Alison was torn. Should she follow this mysterious alien dragon? What if he just led her into more trouble? She stood, considering the options. Shaking her head, she told herself that animals have better senses than humans. Electro knew where he was going, and he probably knew how to get there the fastest.

"Okay," she said, "You lead."

She ran up to where he was, and when she reached him, he started off at a steady walk down the hallway. Alison walked along beside him, her waist was lower than his shoulders, but not by much. Looking at him, Alison pondered how big he was. Much too large to be capable of flight, yet he had wings. Alison decided that she wouldn't judge his physical abilities until she saw him in action.

The hallway curved to the left, and soon Alison was face-to-face with the end of the hallway. There was a big metal door, that has numerous signs posted on, and around it. Most of the signs warned of a large drop on the other side.

"Are you sure this is the right way?" Alison inquired of Electro.

He looked at her, and then at the door. He started walking toward the door, and the sensor-operative system felt his approach. The heavy metal door slid open to admit him. He glanced back at Alison, waiting for her to follow.

Alison put her trust with Electro. Even though they had just met, he seemed like a very reliable companion. She felt completely at ease with him around. The panic that had been haunting her had vanished when she met him.

The funny thing was, she didn't know why she trusted him. It was like meeting a best friend. You know their your friend, even though you never verbally acknowledge it.

She followed Electro through the door, and at the end of a short hallway, there was another 100ft room. It looked exactly like the one she had encountered the alien bat in, except for one detail. There were no boxes hanging from the ceiling. There was not even a ladder leading up to a catwalk, but she could clearly see a railed ledge with another door on the far side. She wondered why Black Mesa needed so many large rooms. What could their purpose possibly be? If there were many more of these in the facility, the structural support wouldn't very good.

The only one difference from the previous room, this one had a large

vent shaft on the wall next to her. Electro was nosing it, trying to get the screen off. Eventually, he used his clawed foot to pry off the screen.

Alison wasn't paying attention, she was trying to figure out how to get across. A thought occurred to her. How did the employees get across on regular work days? There seemed to be no lift, glider, zip-line, or any other means of transport across.

She looked at Electro. Another amusing thought occurred to her.

"Hey Electro," she said sweetly, "Do you think that we could fly across this room?"

He gave her a confused and disgruntled stare.

She tried to approach him, and climb upon his back, but he resolutely refused. He would dance circles around her, trying to escape. When she came close to succeeding to climb upon his back, he went so far as to hiss at her.

Breathless, she gasped out, "Fine. That plan is out."

At those words, Electro walked back over to the larger-than-normal shaft in the wall. He looked at her meaningfully.

"But if I go through there, you won't be able to come with me!" she protested. The shaft was almost big enough for her to walk on her knees through. It wouldn't be easy for Electro to fit.

He looked at her, and blinked twice. That was when his outline shimmered, and then he disappeared completely in a cloud of dark haze. He reappeared a few moments later, about one tenth of his normal size. He could certainly fit in the shaft now.

Alison thought she should be surprised, but with the day she was having, it didn't seem that unusual.

"Well," she said, "I guess you have a solution for everything."

She decided not to delay any longer, and walked over to the shaft. She crawled along inside, with Electro close behind her. It was dark in the vent, so Alison flicked on her built-in flashlight. They were making good progress, when she came to the end of the shaft.

They came out in a room illuminated with red lights. It was a small room, more like a closet. The room was featureless, except for a door on the far wall. Alison didn't see anywhere else to go, so she opened it. On the other side of the door, there was a staircase. The hallway was much too small for Electro to resume normal size in, so he stayed in his mini form. He followed her, contently.

At the bottom of the staircase, there were a few dead headcrabs. Electro sniffed them, and pulled back in disgust. Apparently they smelled as bad as they looked.

A tremor reverberated through the wall. The floor rocked slightly, and the lights flickered. With a groan, the floor fell out from under Alison. The fall was very short, but she was momentarily stunned from the impact. Standing up, she checked over herself to make sure she

was okay.

Nothing appeared to be broken, and Electro swooped down to join her, still in his tiny form. The hallway down on this level was larger, so he resumed his normal size, and looked at Alison with concern. Purring slightly, he nuzzled her hand.

"I'm all right, Electro," she said.

Then she noticed the blood running down her arm. She flipped her arm over, and saw a long gash down her HEV suit. Her arm underneath was bloody. She must have cut the suit and her arm in the fall. The gash was shallow, but messy. Alison started walking down the hall, looking for a closet. She knew that there was always medical supplies in the janitorial closets, and maybe she could find something to patch the suit with.

She spotted one, but when she started walking toward it, Electro growled. His gaze was locked on the janitor closet. His eye pupils had narrowed down into slits, and some of the spikes down his back lifted in a menacing way. She also noticed that his eyes grew to the bright color she'd seen when the soldiers attacked him.

"What's wrong, Electro?" Alison asked, fearing ambush, "Are there monsters in there?"

Without warning, the door to the closet busted open, and the lights went dark. Footsteps came rushing toward her, and she could hear the soldiers' chatter on their radios. She felt Electro leap away from her side.

"Its too dark, I can't see anything!"_ she thought. She didn't dare try firing her sub-machine gun. The soldiers probably had night vision goggles, and could see her every move.

A blast of blue light lit up the room to her left. She could see Electro's eyes glowing in rage, as he tried to fight off the soldiers. There were too many for him, and he fled back down the hallway. She watched him go, and tried to run with him. It was too dark. She tripped, and something hit her hard on the head.

What little light she could see, faded into scary darkness.

Alison awoke to the voice of soldiers. They seemed to be echoing around in her pounding head. Two soldiers gripped her arms, and they were dragging her down a hallway. She tried to kick and fight, but she couldn't move very quickly.

"_They must have drugged me," _she thought.

None too gently, the two soldiers dragging her threw her into a small metal room. There were no windows, and she heard an audible click as they power-locked the door.

She tried to stay awake, but drifted off into a dreamless sleep.

Something wet was licking her face. Alison opened her eyes, and saw straight into the blue depths of a creature's eyes. She sat up, and realized that it was Electro, in his mini form. She stared at him in

amazement.

"How-?" she gasped.

Electro chirruped at her, and walked over to the side of the metal chamber. Turning, he bowed his head and managed a dragon-grin in Alison's direction. He turned back around to face the metal wall. Without warning, he started breathing his electrical fire onto the wall. It almost immediately started to melt. After a few minutes, there was a perfectly round hole in the wall. It was easily large enough for Alison to crawl through.

She wanted to hug the little dragon, but refrained from doing so. Escaping was the first priority, hugging the person who saved her was second.

Halfway out, she noticed that she was looking down at a pair of orange-brown boots. She momentarily panicked, fearing a soldier was watching her progress and about to shoot her. She looked up, and almost drowned in relief.

Gordon Freeman was standing before her, in all his glory. In his left hand, he held a backpack, and in his right had, a shotgun. He handed her the backpack. In it, were Alison's guns.

Electro squeezed out of the hole in the side of the cell, and resumed normal size. He took his place at Alison's right, and looked at Gordon.

Gordon looked back at Electro. He pointed at him, and then at himself, and motioned for her to stay quiet.

Alison gazed at Electro for a long moment. As she did so, she got a strong impression that Electro had found Gordon, and brought him to her. As if reading her thoughts, Electro turned to her and gave a tiny, almost imperceptible nod.

She was about to mention this, when Gordon motioned for her to follow and stay quiet. She understood, and began to follow. Gordon led her out of the room where the metal cell was. Dead soldiers littered the room, there had to be at least a dozen. Alison turned sharply to the shotgun Gordon held in his hand.

He stopped at a power-locked door, and aimed the shotgun at the lock. He shot the panel, and after a few sparks, the door opened without complaint. Alison was a little amazed. _"Now why didn't I think of that?"_ she thought.

Distracted by her thoughts, she didn't notice that Gordon had already moved down the hall, until Electro chirruped for her attention. She looked up, and ran over to him to catch up.

He was standing by a blast door, that said "FLIGHT LAB" in big bold letters above it. Under the flight lab sign, was another sign that said, "Level 10".

Alison was surprised. The soldiers had dragged her from level forty-something to ten? She wanted to cry with joy! Only ten levels to go to the surface! She was about to start cheering, when the blast door opened.

The biggest, emptiest room she'd ever seen spread out before her. Again she wondered about the structural support of the facility.

"I wouldn't want to be caught here in an earthquake," she thought.

What looked like landing bays were all along the walls, and she could see the smashed remains of several jets and helicopters. The room was big enough for several jets to be flying at once, and it made her feel very tiny. It was even bigger than the room with the monstrous bat-thing.

Alison looked around, trying to find out where they were going next. A bright yellow sign attracted her attention away from the actual lab. The sign read "Surface Access at End of Lab".

So, she was headed for the surface. Her original destination in the first place. She looked around, trying to find a place where she could get across the vast room. She found none.

Confused, she looked to Gordon.

"The only way to get out is to fly," she whispered, "And all the aircraft have been destroyed!"

Gordon pointed at Electro, and Electro looked at her.

"Electro doesn't want anyone to be on his back," she tried to explain.

The glance that Gordon and Electro exchanged was an explanation in itself. Electro looked at Alison and nodded his head. Gordon pointed to him again.

"But," Alison started, "If I fly on Electro, how will you get out of the facility?"

Gordon shook his head. For some reason, Alison chose that moment to look at Electro again. She got the distinct impression that Gordon had some unfinished business here, and that he wouldn't be leaving for awhile yet.

Electro blinked, and walked up to the edge of the platform they were standing on. He turned to Alison, waiting for her to get on his back. After some second-long butterflies, she overcame her nervousness and climbed onto his back.

At the last second, she turned to Gordon. "Thank you, and don't get killed down here."

Out of his pack, he pulled out the longest, strangest gun Alison had ever seen. It was so strange, she had no idea how to describe it. Gordon pointed at it meaningfully.

Turning, he ran down the hall. After a few seconds, shots went off, echoing through the labyrinth of what was the Black Mesa facility.

"May fortune smile upon you, Gordon, we shall meet again," Alison

whispered to herself.

That was when Electro took off, and Alison had most of her thoughts knocked aside. The feeling of flying was strange, but wonderful!

Electro pumped his powerful wings. She noted that he had no trouble flying, unlike the bat-bird she'd encountered earlier. She no longer doubted his ability to fly.

The far-away exit was nearing, Alison thought they would make it in a few minutes. She was just starting to relax and enjoy the near-weightlessness, when a mechanical whirring shattered the silence.

An alarm echoed around the giant flight lab. Alison looked up in astonishment when the very ceiling opened up, and folded back. Another giant room, just like the one she was in, had revealed itself.

Except this one was not empty.

A military chopper lowered itself down to Alison's level. It began to fire at them. Alison was close to despair, when Electro's instincts kicked in. Electro went into a state where he does not think in thoughts, but in actions. He became so absorbed with combat, that any thought of what to do would immediately become an action, if it would help his situation. He became 100% faster, and 100% quicker than when he was leisure flying. By the time the bullets from the chopper had reached Electro's position, he was ten yards away, and coming closer to the chopper.

Alison tried to tell Electro to make a run for the exit, but to no avail. When dragons become locked in combat, they intend to win. His eyes glowed brightly. Alison looked around, trying to find something she could use to their advantage. A red button on the wall by where they had took off from, was glowing, almost impatiently.

With careful aim, Alison drew her pistol and fired the gun. It was an epic shot, considering how much Electro was twisting and turning, trying to find a weakness in the chopper's armor. The button was pushed. Violently. A voice came over the speaker.

"Caution. Flight Lab Flight Test will begin now. Please clear the airway, while the computer configures the room."

Many mechanical whirrings filled the air, as the very walls of the Flight Lab began to move. Large pieces of the wall were extended out, creating barriers that could be flown over. Some sections had electrical beams between them, that could be flown through. The biggest trap, was the one at the end of the long chamber. Two pieces of the wall would extend out and smash together, squishing anything that came in between them.

The almost featureless Flight Lab had become a deadly trap for those unfamiliar with flight controls. Alison regretted ever shooting that button. She risked a glance at the chopper behind them. Whoever was driving was one heck of a driver. The chopper was avoiding the obstacles like they were a walk in the park!

Electro abruptly swerved to avoid a sparking electrical beam. Alison thought that was a little weird. For one creature so attuned with electricity, wouldn't he be immune to its affects? Wouldn't he absorb the available energy? Maybe he was avoiding it because he knew SHE was not so immune. For that, she was grateful.

The chopper wasn't catching up to them, but they were having trouble of their own. The obstacles were becoming harder to avoid the closer they got to the exit.

"Electro, try breathing fire at the helicopter!" Alison shouted over the noise of the room.

As if reading her mind, Electro turned abruptly, and his eyes glowed shockingly electric-blue. With a great gasp, a ball of bright blue energy escaped his mouth. It moved fast, like a shooting star.

The helicopter had not chance. It was a direct hit. Alison was about to start cheering, when she realized that the chopper wasn't down. Smoke was coming from the engine, but it was still sky-worthy, and it could still fire at them. That pilot had to be crazy!

Alison had another idea.

Electro knew it before she did. Using all of he speed and momentum, he shot toward the end of the chamber, the chopper following his path. The giant smasher at the end awaited them. At the last second, Electro shot through. The chopper followed, but was too late.

With a great groan, the chopper was smashed against the two large pieces of wall. Shards of metal fell from the now-flat chopper. Chopper blades clattered against the floor when they hit the ground.

Electro's momentum was too great to make a clean landing. At the last second he swerved up, to avoid crashing into the wall. He circled around, and landed with a slight bump.

Alison leaped off his back, and hugged the ground. Her first flight had been more exhilarating than she would have liked. Turning, she saw that Electro was equally winded. Breathing hard, and staring at her, she saw that his eyes has lost the glaring cyan that they acquired whenever he fought.

She limped over to him, and gave him a hug.

"You," she said, "are the best flier I have ever known, or wish to know."

He chirruped a response, and with his large head, he nuzzled her.

After a few seconds of enjoying their escape and relief, Alison looked to the platform they had landed on. The door said, "Exit Shaft" on it. That was a good sign.

But then Alison noticed the fine print.

"Maintenance Shaft Exit. Authorized Remote-Control Craft Only."

Alison didn't know what that meant.

"What do you think, Electro? Is this the right way?"

He nodded an affirmative.

"Then let's go," she said, smiling.

Alison exited the Flight Lab, and entered the hallway. It seemed too quiet, now that she had endured a chopper battle, and the loud smashing panels.

The hallway she was in sloped downward. It was not exactly an encouraging sign, since Alison wanted to be going up, to the surface. Soon, she thought she could hear water dripping, almost like it was raining inside the facility.

Rounding a corner, she came into a room slicked with water. The bottom portion was flooded, with deep, murky water. She couldn't see the bottom. Large catwalks had been placed hastily around the pit of water, as if some sheepish scientists didn't want to be swimming. To her left, there were some stairs. An office observing the tank, maybe?

Alison looked up, and saw where the water was coming from. A pipe in the ceiling was cracked. On the pipe, it said CLEAN WATER FLOW. Alison was a little disappointed. All the clean water was falling into this murky, two-story room.

Electro took one look at the water, and chirruped in delight. Before Alison could stop him, he'd slithered into the water. He looked as graceful as a snake. Alison guessed that swimming would be a lot like flying. Apparently, Electro had been in the water before. He was an expert swimmer. That made Alison wonder what his home was like. It must have water, if he knew how to swim.

Alison turned her attention back to the dark office. She decided that _observatory_ was a better word for it. One of the sides was completely made of glass, and so was part of the floor. It made Alison a little suspicious. This tank was here on purpose. The water leaking from the pipe was a coincidence.

Alison decided to explore the office while Electro took a water break. He seemed to be enjoying himself, and there was no need to destroy his fun. She started climbing the stairs.

The observing station was dark, and she had to feel around for a light-switch. When she found one, the scene before her didn't add up. A scientist was huddled in the corner. He had been so silent, Alison hadn't noticed him until the lights came on.

When she had turned the lights on, he'd cried out, as if in pain. He was rocking back and forth, like a crazed person. She walked up to him, hoping he'd be coherent enough to talk.

"Hey," she said softly, "Are you alright?"

He looked up at her with crazy eyes. "Alright? ALRIGHT? The beast!" he cried.

"What beast?" Alison asked, still softly.

"First it's gone, then it's there again! The others can sense it!" shrieked the crazed man.

"What is this 'it' you keep mentioning?" she queried, trying to figure out his strange talk.

Suddenly, the man seemed to see her for the first time. He took in her HEV suit, and backpack full of guns.

"You're- You're here to help me?" he asked, fearfully.

"Yes," she said calmly, "Now tell me, what are you so afraid of?"

The man took a deep breath. "There- There's something in here with us."

Electro, Alison noted, had stopped splashing around in the tank and come up the stairs to see what all the yelling was about. When she turned to look at him, the crazed man followed her gaze.

"That's one of their kind! You've led it right to us! We're all going to die!" he screamed.

From behind his back, he snatched a crossbow that Alison had not seen. With a wild aim, he shot past Alison, and directly at Electro. He missed completely. Electro had dodged back down the stairs, out of harm's way.

"I killed it!" said the wild-eyed man, "Now there's only the monster in the water! It will come for us all soon!" The man cackled wildly, and then fell over, gasping.

Alison snatched up the crossbow before he could do any damage to himself, or her. She tried to make sense of what she'd just heard.

The man had seen Electro and freaked. Apparently, he knew that there were creatures in the facility. But he kept rambling on about the water. A monster in the water. Alison walked over to the glass portion of the observation room.

She gazed down into the murky gray water. She didn't see anything. Alison let her gaze flick back and forth over the room. Something in here wasn't right. There wasn't even an exit out of this room, or at least, none that she could see. Did that mean that this was a dead end and she'd have to fly back out on Electro's back?

She was lost in thought, when the shadow appeared in the water. It quickly snapped her attention back to the tank. With a splash, the great monster surfaced.

It was a fish, in every respect, except for that it was alien.

The fish was at least 15 feet long, and was an ugly fleshy color. All down it's sides, were slight flashes of blue and green. It's head was by far the most impressive, for it had two tiny red eyes, but a mouth

at least two feet across, filled with dagger-sharp teeth. It's gills looked awkwardly placed, and the large sleek fins erupting from it's body were lined with a large spike each.

Surprisingly, the monster fish had no secondary pair of fins further along it's body. Just one powerful tail, which also had a sharp spike at the end. Overall, the fish was monstrous, and Alison didn't want to be swimming in the ocean that it had come from.

"Well, that proves my theory of there being water in the other dimension," _she thought ironically.

Then she noticed Electro. He was silently and slowly slinking toward the fish. He looked like a panther about to pounce. His wings were tucked tightly against his sides, and his frilly ears laid back tight against his head. His mouth was drawn back in a snarl. Again, his eyes shone brilliant blue.

Although Electro was a good 5 feet longer than the fish, she couldn't help but feel that if the fight were allowed to ensue, Electro would end up getting seriously injured before he won the battle.

"Electro! Don't!" She called, fully expecting him to launch into the water.

He didn't. He looked up, and stared at her.

Alison ran down the flight of stairs, with the newly acquired crossbow in her hand. She left the gasping crazed scientist to his fit, he was too unstable for her to leave him with such a dangerous weapon.

The fish was staring at Electro, hate burning in it's eyes. Electro was no longer staring at the fish though. He was focused on what Alison had to say.

That was when Alison fired the crossbow into the side of the gigantic fish. With a great moan, the fish dove down into the deep. Electro was tracking the fish with his eyes, when the shadow disappeared entirely.

It was quiet. Too quiet. The ripples stopped playing across the surface of the water. The only noises she could hear were the snufflings of the scientist in the other room, and the occasional drip of water from a pipe.

"Did I kill it, Electro?" she asked, puzzled. A fish like that wouldn't back down so easily.

Electro didn't glance up. He was still fixated on the water. He didn't even blink. A minute went by, and then another. Seconds passed in the silence, until finally, Alison was gazing at the water too.

Suddenly the fish sprang out of the water, mouth agape. Teeth, inches from her face were slapped back into the water by Electro's powerful tail. At exact same same moment, Alison fired the crossbow, directly into the monster fish's mouth.

With a great moan, and gasp, the fish slid slowly off the slippery

catwalk into the water. It floated, belly up. Alison scrambled backwards against the wall, breathing hard.

Electro bounded up to her, eyes searching her for the source of her anxiety. With a questioning purr, he licked her hand.

"I'm fine, Electro," she said, "just a little shocked. That was quite a fish. Where do we go now, buddy?"

To answer the question, Electro dove into the water. He was paddling around the top, and staring in Alison's direction.

"Do we have to swim to get out?" she questioned, dreading the thought. What if there were more than one fish in the water?

Electro dove, and a loud crack echoed through the water, and caused ripples on the surface. He resurfaced, and heaved a large metal gate out of the water and onto the catwalk. Then, he purred and urged Alison to get into the water.

After this fish business, Alison didn't know if she'd ever swim in comfort again. But, she slowly lowered herself into the water. As soon as she did, Electro submerged.

It was remarkably clearer underwater. She could see everything, and she saw where Electro had torn out the gate blocking their exit. He was already halfway through it. Alison didn't know how long they'd have to swim for, so she grabbed onto Electro's tail.

She avoided the sharp edges of the now-missing gate, and held a tight grip on Electro's tail. Electro was swimming down a hallway, flooded because of the water. He swerved through several doors, and more hallways, before stopping in a domed hallway so Alison could get some air.

After a short breather, she once again held onto Electro's tail. He was swimming faster now, and Alison noticed there was a current. Looking ahead, Alison saw that they were rapidly coming toward a giant gear blocking the rest of the passage. They were in the water filtration system! Electro swerved up, and they emerged into the brightly lit room. The filtration system control room.

Alison scrambled out of the water, gasping for breath. Electro looked mildly amused, and stood watching her. He shook himself and droplets of water careened off his scales in a cascade of rainbows. After a moment or two, he walked slowly toward a metal blast door and sniffed. His ears stood straight up, and he started nosing the keypad one the right of the door.

Alison stood up from her gasping position, and strolled toward the door, trying not to look foolish. Heavy metal suits did not make for good swimming. At least it was waterproof.

She didn't know the password on the keypad, but she didn't want to try shooting it yet. She walked back over to the control station, and looked around for a clue. There were buttons and switches aplenty, but she saw no access codes.

As a last resort, she looked under the control panel. A large glowing red button stared back at her. It said, "abort" on it. She was very

tempted to press it, but she knew that something bad would probably happen if she did. She stepped away from the controls, and exited the small room.

A loud screeching sound filled the air. Alison turned around and saw Electro dragging his claws along the door. It was created deep rends in the door, but there was no way he could open it like that unless they had a couple days to spare.

Alison sighed, and pulled out her pistol. She aimed at the keypad, and pulled the trigger.

Nothing happened.

Alison took a moment to register what had just happened. She gave the gun a funny look, and tried to fire again. Nothing. Not even a click.

She threw the dripping gun down with frustration. Electro walked over to the fallen object, and sniffed. He tried to bite it, but didn't like the taste and spat it out. Then, he did what he did to everything he found unlikable.

He opened his mouth, and zapped the gun with a bit of electrical fire. Sparks flew around the gun, and then stopped. The gun was glowing a faint blue color for a few moments, and then darkened.

Alison picked up the gun. It was cold to the touch. She aimed the pistol at the door again, and pulled the trigger.

Again, nothing. Alison threw the gun into the water, out of frustration. She sprinted to the keypad, and pressed the first five numbers that came to mind.

She typed, 1-2-3-4-5.

A tone rang out through the room, and the door opened. Alison gaped at the door, and then collapsed laughing. She laughed long and hard, like she was mentally challenged. Electro noticed her position, and then looked at the door. He walked through the door, and then chirruped to get Alison's attention.

She ceased her maniacal laughing, and stood up at once.

"Right," she said, embarrassed, "Lead the way."

Electro twitched an eye, as if he were laughing, then he turned and went down the hallway. Alison followed. The hallway was strange, because of how small it was. It was more like an enlarged Ventilation Shaft. She half expected to see a screen at the end of it.

Instead, the shaft ended in another blast door. She entered the code again, and it opened, to show the largest room Alison had seen yet.

The room was made of the same material that the vent shafts were made from, but this was one big room. It had to be at least a half mile across, and at least that deep. There was a control station to her left, and an enlarged concrete ledge. From the edge of this ledge,

she could look down into the room safely, as there was a guard rail.

"This is getting ridiculous! Why are there so many giant rooms?" she thought angrily. These rooms were getting in the way of her escape. She thought back to that monster of a contract she signed when she had first started working here.

She started to wish that she had actually read it. Maybe it could explain why she hadn't seen a single emergency exit in the entire facility.

Alison jumped down from the shaft. Electro immediately went over to the guard rail, and spread his wings. This was the largest area he had encountered, and wanted to do some flying. Alison wasn't going to stop him.

But something was wrong. Right as he was about to take off, he stopped. He got down off the edge, and started flapping around. To his amazement, and horror, he could not fly in this room. He looked pretty depressed, and Alison didn't really know how to comfort him. How can you tell a bird that's lost its wings, that it will be okay?

She jogged on over to the controls. There were three switches on the control panel, and two of the three were malfunctioning, and sparking all over the place. The third switch was glowing red, and in the off position.

Above the switch, there was a diagram showing what the switch's responsibility was. This one would turn on a fan. Alison was sort of hot, and she thought a nice breeze would be nice. She flipped the switch.

A meter on the wall started going down. The level of water vapor was lowering. Alison didn't notice. She looked at Electro once again. He still looked like a lost bird.

Alison rushed over to him. "You'll be okay, won't you?"

As if to prove what she thought, he tried flapping again. His result was almost laughable. He couldn't take off in this room.

"There is something funny about this place..." she thought.

The meter on the wall continued to lower slowly.

Alison looked down into the monstrous room. She had detected movement. She was astonished to see that a giant fan, big as the room, was turning. It was incredibly slow, but she knew that once it picked up speed, there was going to be more than a breeze in there. That was one big fan.

Electro had spotted the movement too, and was tracking one of the blades with his eyes. He had his wings poised, as if he was about to take off at any moment.

The meter on the wall was still dropping... And Electro could sense it.

"Electro," Alison started, "We need to get out of here. Something's wrong."

Alison saw a door beside the controls she'd been messing with earlier. She thought that would probably be their best exit. She started walking toward the door, but Electro suddenly jumped in front of her. He wouldn't let her pass.

"Electro, come on, we have to get out of here," Alison said, frustrated.

Electro slowly shook his head. No.

The meter continued to drop, and the fan blades were picking up speed.

Electro gazed into Alison's eyes. Alison got a strong impression that he wanted her to get onto his back, _now. _He was saving her, and he knew where to go.

"Okay," she said defeatedly, "I trust you."

She climbed onto Electro's back. He hop-jumped to the edge of the chamber. The fan blades were spinning really fast now, and the breeze alone would knock a normal person off their feet.

Electro spread his wings, as the water vapor meter dropped to 50%, and held constant. Then he jumped. For a terrible moment, Alison thought that he wouldn't be able to fly. For a spilt-second, they were falling to their deaths... and then they were flying free.

The relief was almost too much.

It was a wonderful sensation, to be flying. The room was large, and Alison loved the feeling of the wind on her face, caressing her hair. The moment lasted mere seconds, when the echo of gunfire came across the chamber.

Where Alison and Electro had been standing moments ago, there were at least 50 soldiers swarming across the platform. They were coming out of the door that Alison had wanted to exit through. She was glad she'd gone with Electro's plan.

"How are we getting out of here again?" Alison shouted over the wind.

Electro looked up, and Alison followed his gaze. The ceiling tapered to a point, and she could see daylight filtering through a web of boards. It was the main exit shaft that led to the surface!

Across the mile wide room, tiny little figures were firing tiny little guns. They were horrible distance shots, but Alison found them annoying. Plus, she didn't want the soldiers to radio in her position. For all she knew, the surface exit she was about to use could be crawling with soldiers.

"Electro," she called over the noise of the blades, "We have to get rid of those soldiers first!"

Twitching slightly, Electro turned toward the gunfire. After a

moment, he opened his mouth and let them have the electrical fury that was his name. The blue energy that shot from his mouth moved so fast, the soldiers didn't even have a chance to move out of the way.

Within moments, every single soldier was gone.

"Nice aim," Alison said quickly.

Electro took a sharp right, heading back to where the shaft was in the ceiling. They had drifted with the wind farther away from it.

As they did, several more soldiers came flooding out the door. One of them shouted in frustration. His voiced echoed across the room to Alison.

"Great! Now we've lost both of the orange wonders!"

Alison didn't stop to think about what that meant, she was too preoccupied with escaping. It did however, register in the back of her mind that "orange wonder" must have something to do with her HEV suit. She ignored the distracting thought, and directed Electro to blast the boards out of the way.

After doing so, and dodging falling wood bits, they flew through the shaft. It was too narrow for Electro to flap in; they were relying on the wind caused by the fan alone. It was dark in the shaft, and Alison hoped it wasn't very long.

After what seemed like minutes, but was really only seconds, they burst through the top, and found themselves blinking in the bright daylight. The almost didn't see the top of the canyon.

The jagged ridges came closer by the second, and Electro was blinded by the brightness of the sun.

"Electro, you're going to hit the ridge!" Alison shouted.

Electro stopped pumping his wings, and settled out into a glide, he landed close to the exit shaft they had come from. He looked around, blinking. He seemed to notice the sharp ridge for the first time.

Alison jumped down from Electro's back, and looked around. She almost didn't believe where she was. This was the surface! She'd made it!

She threw her arms into the air, and whooped in joy. Electro seemed happy by her excitement, and watched her in amusement. He spread his wings, and fanned himself, successfully blowing all the dust marring his scales off. It was hot out under the desert sun, but Electro didn't mind.

Alison didn't mind either. Her suit came with a built-in air conditioner. Only her face was warming up, and she could live with that. Alison stopped her celebrations, and looked around the canyon they were now stuck in.

Further ahead, she could see that the canyon forked. She looked up to see if they could fly out of the canyon. It was too narrow. She might

fit, but Electro would never make it.

Alison walked down toward the forked paths. Down the one on the right, she could hear water trickling. It sounded like a river. The other fork sloped gently up, and could have been a way out.

Alison decided that they would try the river fork. She was thirsty anyway, and didn't want to be suddenly exposed on the rock face. She took the right fork, and Electro joined her.

After a few moments, the dripping noise got louder. It turned to a river rush, and Alison could see the glimmer of water. The two escapees emerged from the fork, onto a riverbank. It was a small river, no broader than ten feet. It didn't look especially deep either.

Alison bent down, and cupped her hands. She brought the cool water to her lips, and began to drink deeply. It was the best water she had ever tasted. A large slurping sound woke her from her ecstasy. She looked to her left in amusement, and Electro guzzled the water from the stream.

Alison edged away from the water. She still didn't trust whatever could be lurking in it, even if it was only two feet deep. She watched Electro, as he waded out into the middle of the stream. At it's deepest point, which was a little less than three feet, he laid down, trying to let the water cover as much of his as possible. Alison noted his behavior. Why did he like water so much, when alien creatures like the monster fish could be lurking within?

After a few minutes, Electro emerged from the water, and shook himself. Droplets of water shed from his scales like rain, and left him the darkest ebony black that Alison had ever seen. Alison noticed that his blue eyes had also brightened considerably. Maybe water was scarce, wherever he came from. Maybe that's why he liked it so much.

For all she knew, maybe water had magical healing properties.

Alison looked around the riverbank area. A few yards downstream, she noted a large pipeline leading up the surface of the cliff. It was sloped gently enough that she could walk straight into it, and the up it, to the top of the canyon. Also, it was big enough for Electro to walk in, without shifting his size.

Now there was just the matter of crossing the stream. Alison didn't like water much, after that fishy she had found. She thought it through, and decided that no fish of great size could possibly survive in an alien climate, in a three-foot stream.

Before she could think about it anymore, she ran across the stream sending up splashes in the river. Electro walked over leisurely, and gave her a strange look. He cocked his head to one side, watching her strange dance across the river. He gave a purring chirrup that could have been interpreted as laughter.

Alison reached the opposite side, and looked into the pipe. It was illuminated with a red light every four feet, and she could see all the way to the top. Alison ran forward, trying not to make her steps echo. She emerged at the top, and halted immediately.

There were at least twenty soldiers, milling around in the scraggly brush. Alison backed up a few feet, and was gently prodded by Electro's nose.

"Sorry," she whispered, "this way's blocked."

She couldn't go back down the pipe, she'd made too much noise coming up. Instead, she ducked into some bushes after telling Electro to remain in the pipe until she signaled him.

Alison looked around, and saw a dam. So that's where the water originated from. She was level with the top of the dam, and it was only about twenty yards away. It was swarming with soldiers.

As if it wasn't bad enough, Alison heard a dull thud to the air, and saw a military chopper flying above. It looked like an exact copy of the one she'd seen in the Flight Lab, only this one had a different number painted on the side. It was looking for something, and Alison thought she knew what.

"If that chopper sees me, I'm dead." _she thought.

Alison judged the distance from where she was hiding, and a blast door on the side of the dam where the most soldiers clustered. She'd never make it, if she ran. Plus, there was a cannon mounted directly to the left of the door.

If she was on the dam, it could shoot her. Alison looked around hopelessly. There didn't seem to be an escape route.

She ducked down into the bushes when a soldier glanced into her direction. For a horrible moment, she was sure he had seen her. She heard footsteps, and several soldiers called out an alarm! She panicked, and glanced over to see how much distance she had to get back to the pipe. She was astonished to see that the soldiers were not running toward her.

Across the dam, behind her, a giant creature had emerged from the facility. It was a bipedal thing, and was covered in a deep green-blue metal from head to foot. It's back was arched, giving it a hunched look. Alison couldn't see any eyes from where she was standing, but the huge clawed feet and large crablike hands were big enough. Alison took a second glance. The creature didn't have hands! They were flamethrowers, or some alien device close to them.

The beast was clearly sentient, even though it was roaring like an animal. It had bashed down the three-foot thick metal blast door, and was charging across the dam! It's giant feet barley had enough room to set down on, and it looked like it was moments from tripping.

Soldiers were arranged in formations, and were firing with everything they had. The cannon on the dam was going off like crazy, and the noise was deafening. The biped started revving up its flamethrowers, as the bullets glanced harmlessly off its metal armor. The cannon however, was a different matter.

A large gash appeared in the side of the creature, and it toppled over the side of the dam. A gargantuan splash took place, drenching

soldiers. The water spilled over to the other side of the dam, and it looked like some magical fairy waterfall.

Alison couldn't see the side of the dam the creature had fallen over, but from the sound of things, it could not swim. Alison heard the soldiers cheering at their unexpected victory. A few of them ran to see where the creature had fallen.

As if a switch was flipped, they were suddenly silent. It was as if they were looking for a new prey, in an orange HEV suit...

Alison froze, looking from her little hole in the bushes. The majority of the soldiers were marching across the dam, and entering the door the beast had bashed open. Alison watched them file out, and heard one soldier speaking over the loudspeaker.

"Your orders are to find and capture, not to kill. Our quarry was last spotted in the ventilation control room," came a crackly voice from the intercom.

Soon, all the soldiers had left the dam, except two. One was standing behind a wall of sandbags, while the other was stationed behind the cannon. They were standing guard.

Alison looked in Electro's direction. He was still waiting patiently in the pipe, and he too was staring at the two soldiers. She thought about climbing onto his back and flying out of the area, but as if to remind her, the helicopter flew out from behind a rise and hovered over the dam.

She looked out at the dam, and thought.

"We could probably sneak up on those two soldiers, there's enough brush to cover our approach. The only way to go seems to be the other side of the dam, where the beast fell." _

She signaled Electro to crawl over to her location. She whispered for him to be sneaky, and quiet. He nodded at her, and shifted to his smaller form. He would be concealed better like that.

Alison looked up before she initiated the plan. She couldn't believe her luck, when the helicopter suddenly turned and flew off over a rise.

Electro started slithering over toward the soldiers on his belly, while Alison pulled her crossbow out, and took aim. Electro was almost to the point, to initiate the first part of the plan. When he reached ten feet away from the nearest soldier, he turned around and winked in her direction.

Alison saw it all through the crossbow scope. At once, she fired at the soldier manning the cannon. At the exact same time, Electro erupted from the bushes and pounced on the second man. Electro had gone back to his original size while in mid air, and the panicky soldier had a full-sized problem on his hands.

The soldier was not a wimp, and was actually able to knock one of Electro's legs out from under him. With his arm free, he grabbed his gun and started firing like mad. Electro was amused when the soldier jumped up and started speaking rapidly.

"You filthy beast!" he spat, "All of you are illegal alien immigrants!" With that, the soldier took aim once again, confident that this would be the last he saw of this alien. What he did not know, was the Electro had power on his side.

A quick burst of the blue light from Electro's mouth rendered the soldier gone. There was nothing left, it was as if he had been teleported out of the universe. Alison had been watching the whole episode from a safe distance, and approached with caution.

Alison looked around, to make sure there were not more soldiers sneaking up on her. Then, she bent down and took the soldier's ammunition. She didn't know if she'd need the bullets or not, and it was always handy to have extra ammunition.

The dam was as silent as a grave, and Alison quietly jogged over to the opposite side of the dam, where the giant creature had fallen in. She could see a control tower in the middle of the water. It was within easy swimming distance, and she could even fly there on Electro. The tower had about 15 feet of it sticking out of the water, the rest was submerged by at least 30 feet of water.

She looked over the edge. The giant creature was gone, not even a ripple played across the water. But, what she could see was even more disturbing. A dark shape about 17 feet long was swimming around in circles, like a shark.

It was another one of the monster fishes, only this one was bigger. Electro gazed down into the sparkling water, and hissed when he spotted the fish. His eyes narrowed into slits, and he tensed up into a form of pure attack power. He spat some of his fury into the water, but to no avail. The electricity was not enough to charge the water, and the fish remained unharmed.

Alison realized that she needed to get to that tower out in the middle of the water. Maybe it had some controls in it, that would allow her to raise the dam or something.

"Electro, can you land on that tower?" she asked.

Electro glanced at the tower, and nodded once. He turned about and waited for her to climb on his back. She did so, and then they were off toward the tower. The catwalk was just wide enough for him to land on, and Alison slid off his back.

She ran into the tower, to see what controls were in there. Inside, the tower was a fairly small room, only about six feet wide. The sides were covered in control panels, and big shiny buttons. Alison saw that all the controls were offline, except for three. She read the labels carefully.

One switch would raise the dam, and drain the water. Another switch would start the filtration systems. The last control, was a big green button. It looked as if it had been hastily rigged up by a group of soldiers, and it had a detonation timer on it. If she pressed that button, it would blow up the dam, and probably anything in the immediate vicinity.

Alison thought for a moment, and decided her best bet would be to

raise the dam. It would drain the water, and she could walk out along the bottom of the channel. Then, the helicopter wouldn't spot her, and she wouldn't be pressed up against a cliff.

She flipped the switch, and watched from the window as the dam started to lift. Beams started to shudder and creak. Sparks were flying all over the place, and Electro gave up his sentry mode. He shrunk, and zoomed into the tower. He looked at Alison expectantly.

She was fixated on the dam. It wasn't raising, and she could hear the moan of the beams as it tried. Furious, she pumped the switch a few more times, trying to get it to move faster. It didn't do anything, so she started flipping the other switch instead, right as the power went out.

Backup power came on, and the tower was illuminated with the red glow of emergency lights. There was a crash, and the few feet that the dam had managed to raise, disappeared under its heavy bulk. Then, the grinding of gears and machinery came on! She had started the filtration system up again!

A terrible moaning came from the water below. Alison ran over to the window, to see what it was. The monster fish was thrashing in the water, as the level dropped to only a few feet deep. Since the fish was so large, it could no longer swim. It flopped around, and then lay still, breathing slowly. Its red eyes looked at her, hatefully.

Alison would have laughed, but a new surprise caught her attention. The dam was hollow! She could see a door, leading to the inside! It was wide open, and must have been flooded before she lowered the water level. Lights were flickering inside.

She would have ignored the dam facility completely, if she hadn't noticed one deadly fact. The water level was rising again, slowly, but surely. If it was still rising, then that meant it would soon be full again. Her plan to walk along a dry channel fell apart.

"Rats, now I'm going to have to go back underground," she said angrily.

She walked out of the tower onto the catwalk, and started climbing the ladder down to the riverbed. It was only two feet deep, and she started walking toward the facility. She kept her distance from the thrashing monstrosity a couple yards away. It moaned again, and tried to flop its way over to where she was. It failed, and lay there in the muddy water, panting.

Alison looked at the fish. It would survive the hot sun, as its body was covered in a curious work of scales, unlike the one in the facility she had first encountered.

Electro had resumed normal form, and walked over to the fish. He looked at it, with a strange expression on his face. If the fish had so chosen, it could have tried to claw Electro's eyes out with its sharp fins, but it did not. It gazed back into Electro's mesmerizing eyes.

Suddenly, the fish thrashed and tried to snap Electro's nose

off.

Electro snapped out of his hypnotizing state, and looked at Alison. She didn't want to waste ammo on the fish, so she promptly turned and ignored it. Electro followed her example, and danced out of range.

Alison tried to forget the whole experience as she strolled calmly toward the facility in the dam. The lights continued the flicker inside the building, and the water level was still rising slowly. Alison stepped inside the dam, and Electro followed.

There was a long, slanted hallway, that led up to a door. Alison opened it, and found herself in a room in a very waterlogged state. A holographic map projector was sparking in a corner, it's circuits full of water. Alison walked over to it, as it was the object of interest in the small room. For some reason, Alison didn't like the room. It felt like a trap.

The holo-projector ran on a small battery, and was surprisingly still working. It showed a map of the area. Alison saw that the nearest city was about thirty miles away. The area map was useful, but Alison didn't know what half the symbols on the map meant. She pressed a button on the panel, trying to change the mode.

The panel now said that she was looking at all the life-signs in the facility. There was a key at the bottom of the map. It said:

Green â€" US Soldier.

Orange â€" HEV Suit

Blue â€" Black Mesa Employee

Red â€" Unknown Entity

Alison looked at the map, and saw that her suit was being tracked. She could see an orange dot on the map. It showed her exact location, right under the dam. She scanned the rest of the map for any more orange dots. She was surprised to see one. She thought for a moment, and then remembered. Gordon Freeman was also wearing a suit. It must have been him.

She watched the the second orange dot encounter a red dot. After a few seconds, the red dot faded away. Gordon was be killing aliens. Alison looked back to her dot, and saw several green dots headed toward her.

"Oh no!" she said.

A dripping sound alerted Alison to another predicament. She whipped around, to see that the door she entered from was completely submerged. Her sense of unease grew a few levels.

"What happened? I was only in here for a few minutes," she said, panic setting in.

The water level must have started rising faster, and now she was trapped in the small room. Desperate, she looked around for another exit. There wasn't one, but there was a scuba gear set in a glass

case on the wall.

Alison grabbed a chair, to smash the glass. She got up to the case, and noticed she was stepping on something squishy. She looked down, and saw a man inflated with water. His face was blue, and he was badly bloated. Alison wondered why he hadn't used the scuba gear to swim out. She hoped it wasn't broken.

Her feet sloshed around in the inch-deep water on the floor. She hurriedly put the scuba suit on, over her HEV suit. When she finally got it all on, the floor was covered with a foot of water. She signaled to Electro, who had been standing watch at the door, that she was ready to go for a swim. Alison opened the door, and a wall of water came cascading out of the hallway. She dove into it, and followed Electro's tail. It was the easiest to see in the gloomy hallway. She hoped that the monster fish wasn't sneaking up on her.

She swam to the end of the hallway, and watched Electro's tail disappear around the corner. At the last second, she noticed something was wrong. Electro's tail jerked awkwardly, and the shot forward a lot faster than it should have.

She knew something had been wrong ever since she entered the room, and now her suspicions had been confirmed. She kept going down the tunnel, she couldn't turn back. She rounded the corner, and was confronted by at least ten scuba-gearred soldiers. Before she knew it, she was surrounded.

Something pricked her arm, and a soldier from behind her drew back. He'd poked her with an syringe. A syringe full of what?

A heavy sleepiness overcame Alison, and her vision blurred. Bright lights seemed to be dancing around her eyes, as she lost motor control, and became unconscious.

She awoke with a headache. A headache, and the urge to puke. Alison was lying face down on the ground. Her wetsuit was gone, along with all of her weapons. She tried to sit up, and experienced a wave of nausea. She let the sensation pass, and the she looked up.

She was in a cage, surrounded by soldiers. They were everywhere, marching, sleeping, talking, or just sitting. The hot desert sun was beating down with a vengeance, and many of the soldiers were sunburned.

Alison examined the cage. It was sturdy, she wasn't going to be able to break the bars. She pondered why the soldiers had not just killed her. Why go to the trouble of putting her in a cage? She sighed, and tried to look for positives in the situation.

The cage was in the shade, and they had let her keep the HEV suit. Alison sat back down, and pretended to act like she was hot. Maybe the soldiers didn't know that the suit had a built-in air-conditioner. One of the soldiers eyed her enviously, and she decided to stop acting.

It dawned on her that Electro wasn't with her. Sitting up abruptly, she looked around. Electro was nowhere in sight. She frowned, hoping that he hadn't been killed.

"Where could he be?" Alison wondered.

"Excuse me," she said to the soldier guarding her cage, "Where is the creature?"

"What creature?" the man hissed, "I've seen thousands of blasted creatures today!"

"The black one with the blue eyes," Alison said patiently.

"That one?" the man said, a fearful look in his eyes, "That one... I'm not supposed to tell you! Witch! Don't talk! Stop asking questions!"

She decided not to push the subject, but a question still bothered her mind. Why hadn't they just shot her when they dragged her out of the water? She thought about it for a moment, and then decided that they must be waiting for orders or something.

Hours later, the light began to fade. Alison was bored out of her mind, despite the fact that she could probably be shot at any moment. At dusk, she began to drift off to sleep.

Then something exploded.

There was fire in the sky, and the soldiers ran toward it's source. The sound of gunfire echoed across the high canyon walls. A wall of fire had cut off the soldiers from the exit. There was something weird about this wall of fire, it had a faint blue tinge...

A glimmer of light in the sky caught Alison's eye. In a ray of sunshine, a dark figure was soaring through the sky, blasting blue from it's mouth. On the figure's back, was a man dressed in an orange HEV suit. He was waving the strangest weapon Alison had ever seen high above his head. The man was outlined in a halo of fire, looking like a black angel falling from the heavens.

The gun Gordon was holding suddenly lowered, and before Alison's eyes, she saw entire platoons of soldiers vanish into dust when the orange laser touched them. Within moments, what had been over 100 men was reduced to mere dozens. Those dozens were running away, screaming. Some had even jumped over the side of the dam, and were swimming for the opposite shore. What they didn't know, was the monster fish still lurked down there. She watched a few of them get eaten by the fish.

Alison was so absorbed in watching the soldiers flee, she almost didn't notice when Electro landed softly in front of her cage. Gordon slid off his back, and started working with the latch.

After a few moments, the cage opened. Alison leaped out, and ran over to Electro. He was just as excited as she was, and was chirruping like crazy. After a few moments of joyous reunion, Alison turned back to Gordon.

"Thank you," she said, "For saving me again."

He nodded at her, and pointed to Electro. Alison understood the meaning.

"Electro found you, didn't he?" she said, smiling.

After nodding, Gordon whistled. As if on command, a scientist came running out of a door on the side of the dam. He turned to Gordon.

"It's all clear, you have a straight path," the scientist said.

The scientist turned to Alison, "You must head for the city, the government won't dare send soldiers there, for fear of causing panic."

"Okay," Alison said, a bit confused.

She got sidetracked when Electro nuzzled her hand. He seemed to have missed her a lot, so she gave him a hug. When she looked back up, Gordon was walking away toward a door with the lambda sign over it. The scientist was following him closely. Electro chirped, and caught Alison's attention.

She gazed into his beautiful eyes, and got the distinct impression that Gordon still had unfinished business in the Black Mesa Facility.

"C'mon, Electro," she said, "Let's get to that city."

She turned back to see Gordon disappear into the doors of the facility, and then climbed onto Electro's back. He pumped his powerful wings, and launched out of the canyon. The hot wind was exhilarating, and Electro was enjoying himself immensely. Alison reflected on her experiences of the last day or two, while flying in the peaceful air.

"What would I have done if I hadn't found Electro?" she thought.

The city got bigger and bigger as they approached. About a half-mile out, they landed. Alison didn't want to spook anyone with Electro's fierce form. Besides, another half-mile of walking wasn't going to kill her.

She watched the very last edge of the sun disappear over the flat horizon, as the gate to the city drew closer. After a moment of walking in total darkness, Alison came in contact with the gate into the city.

Alison decided that "town" was a better word. It was modern, but small. The gate was a sturdy steel, but it was unlocked. As she opened the gate, a blinding green flash from behind stopped her. She turned around, hoping it wasn't some more aliens she'd have to fight. All of her weapons had been taken by the soldiers.

Electro was staring into a great green portal, his eyes were as wide as could be. Then, a dragon head emerged from the portal, it was at least three times bigger than Electro's. It stared at him, with glowing azure eyes. It did not take its eyes off his.

Electro made a purring sound to the other dragon, and it responded with a half hiss. It beckoned with its nose for Electro to follow it

into the portal.

_"Electro knows this dragon, it must be his mother!" _Alison thought, reeling, _"And she's telling him to come home!" _

Alison felt torn. She didn't want to deprive Electro of parental care, but she didn't want to lose who was now her best friend either. She stared at Electro's almost miniscule size compared to the azure-eyed dragon. He was young, much younger than Alison had originally thought. He wasn't a baby, but he wasn't an adult either. She wanted to cry. If he left, she'd be alone. She didn't want to be alone.

Electro turned to Alison, as if looking for some sign of what she wanted him to do. For such a young dragon, he possessed remarkable intelligence. Alison wondered if that intelligence would grow if he went back to his home. Finally, she made her decision.

With tears in her eyes, she said "Go home Electro, go on."

At the sound of her voice, Electro faced the portal. The azure-eyed dragon pulled it's head back into the glowing green vortex. Electro took a few hesitant steps toward it, and then stopped. He turned to look at Alison again.

His eyes were glowing a blinding cyan. A single wet tear dropped from his eye, and he let out a keening wail, that ended with a purr.

Alison took that as goodbye, and waved to him, tears streaming down her face. He took another instant to look at her, and then slowly strode through the portal. As soon as the end of his tail vanished, the portal closed. The green light was gone.

Electro was gone.

It was as if she'd imagined the whole thing.

She whipped around, and walked through the gate, unwilling to gaze upon the spot that she'd last seen her friend. She closed the gate behind her, and that's when she heard the screams.

She jumped, and looked closely at the town before her. Buildings were on fire, mothers and kids were crying and running through the streets, being chased by figures in gas-masks.

They weren't human.

Then she saw the hovercraft, and the alien ships above the city. She gazed at them in horror. In the gloom of the night, she saw several of the figures in gas-masks turn to look in her direction. She could hear their alien voices crackling with surprising clarity over their intercoms. Two of them started running toward her, and they were fast.

Alison gasped, and turned back toward the gate. She quickly opened it, and took a glance backward. They were almost on top of her. With one last burst of speed, she ran through the gate. She tripped through the green, glowing portal that appeared in front of her, that very second.

The buzzing sensation was deafening. It tickled, and hurt at the same time. Then suddenly, it was over. She was lying face-down, on a hard, black surface. She sat up gasping, hardly believing her narrow escape. She looked around, to see where the unexpected portal had taken her.

It was a room. And it was black. It was black as space. The layout was confusing, and she couldn't tell how big it was. It could have been miles, and it could have been inches. However big it was, she saw a window in the black room. Through the window, a soft green light was emanating.

Unsteadily, she walked over to it, and gazed through.

Gordon Freeman was standing on the other side. A man dressed in a smart-looking blue suit was there. He kept adjusting his tie, and he seemed to be speaking to Gordon.

Alison could only hear bits and snatches of the conversation.

"You've accomplished...period of time...Mr. Freeman. My clients...wondered...for hire?" said the man in the suit, "if not...cannot hope of winning."

Gordon said nothing. Alison noticed that he had been stripped of all weapons. He held nothing in his hands. However, he was still wearing the HEV suit.

"Mr. Freeman, it's time to choose." said the man. Alison noticed he had strange blue-green eyes.

A portal opened near Gordon. He took notice of it, and glanced back at the man.

"Just enter the portal, if you agree..." the man gushed.

Alison wondered who the man was. Why did he want to hire Gordon Freeman? What was his purpose in all this? Who WAS this guy?

Suddenly, the man turned in her direction. He made eye contact with her, for a half second. When he did, voices echoed around Alison's head.

"G-Man..." _they whispered, "G-Man..." _

"G-Man," Alison found herself whispering. It was then she noticed Gordon step around G-Man. He entered the portal, and a flare of bright light told Alison that he was no longer anywhere near her.

G-Man turned toward Alison.

"Hello, Miss Williams. I've been... watching you. You too, could be a... valuable... asset." he said, with strange intonation on the words.

"What?" Alison asked, confused.

"I'm not going to offer you the illusion of... a free choice... You too, shall be needed later." he whispered back.

The lights began to fade. The voices continued to whisper "G-Man" in her head. Before she knew it, she was back facing the burning city.

She didn't care when one of the figures snatched her from behind, and dragged her onto a waiting ship. She didn't respond when the pricked and poked her with countless needles and objects of unknown purpose. When they laid her down onto a soft white bed, and closed the glass cover, only then did she begin to scream.

She screamed for what felt like hours, but was only minutes. The sleeping gases emitted from tiny holes on the side of the glass coffin, soon silenced her, as she drifted off to sleep.

"Something has gone wrong..." _was her last conscious thought. The alien sleeping agents were fast and powerful. She doubted she would awaken again for a long time.

G-Man visited her in her nightmare of a sleep. He was talking to her... again.

"We have an agreement," _he said evilly, "_You will not be held here for long." _

She was lifted from the glass coffin, by what seemed to be pure energy. Aliens in their suits tried to snatch her back up, but failed. It all seemed like a crazy twisted dream. Everything was unreal. And then the lights grew bright. She could see no more.

G-Man's voice continued to echo in her head. Somehow, she managed to figure out that she wasn't dead. She tried to search for a better word, in her drug-filled dreams.

Stored.

She was being stored for a later purpose. By who? The enemy? She wasn't sure who the enemy was anymore. She could barely think anymore. And she was alone.

She had escaped from the facility.

She had beaten the creatures inside.

She had ridden a dragon.

She had lost her best friend.

Electro was home.

She'd seen the wreckage of the cities.

She had survived...

But all was not well. Earth was being invaded, and the people of earth had lost. All she could think of, was how much she needed

Electro's help now.

End of Story One

End
file.